

VZCZCXRO7415
RR RUEHAG RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHHO RUEHNG RUEHNL RUEHRD RUEHROV RUEHRS
RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHCV #0077/01 0252120
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 252120Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0342
INFO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000077

SIPDIS
AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN PASS TO AMEMBASSY GRENADA
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PASS TO AMCONSUL QUEBEC
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2035/01/25
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#) [MOPS](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ "WANTS TO TALK WITH U.S."; DECLARES HIMSELF A MARXIST

REF: 10 CARACAS 23; 10 CARACAS 41; 09 CARACAS 309; 10 CARACAS 29
10 CARACAS 51

CLASSIFIED BY: Robin Meyer, Political Counselor; REASON: 1.4(D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During his January 15 annual address to the National Assembly (AN) and in subsequent public remarks, President Chavez formally declared himself a "Marxist," criticized President Obama for "serving the interests of the Empire," and affirmed that the Venezuelan government (GBRV) "wants to talk" with the United States, highlighting the recent meeting between Vice Foreign Minister Arias Cardenas and Ambassador Duddy (ref a). Chavez also seemed to put a close to the story of alleged U.S. incursions into Venezuelan airspace by saying the U.S. military planes had not shown "aggressive intent." He also criticized the Catholic Church and acknowledged the quickly-aborted electricity rationing plan for the Caracas area had been "poorly executed." End Summary.

"The Revolution Will Not Fall; Chavez Will Not Fall"

¶2. (SBU) In an almost 5-hour "state of the nation" address to the National Assembly on January 15, attended by his Cabinet, the diplomatic corps, and some state and local government officials, President Chavez affirmed that he and his revolution would not fall and recounted the successes of the government during the past year in stemming the banking crisis, reinforcing the social missions, reducing income inequality, addressing violence, and taking its place on the world stage (ref b). He also admitted a huge error in the implementation of the proposed electricity rationing plan for Caracas. However, even before addressing these domestic issues, Chavez spoke about U.S.-Venezuelan relations and recounted his meeting with President Obama in April. He also announced himself a "Marxist." The speech was carried on all television and radio networks as a "cadena," a mandatory broadcast, but after an hour and a half, Chavez announced that he would end the "cadena" (but continue his address to the National Assembly) in "respect for the baseball fans" so that the networks could carry a much anticipated playoff game.

The "Enigma" of Relations With Obama and the U.S.

¶3. (SBU) During his speech to the National Assembly, and then again during a January 17 television interview by former Vice

President (and now media commentator) Jose Vicente Rangel, Chavez discussed his evolving perspective on the "enigma" of President Obama. He stressed that Obama had taken the initiative to seek him out and shake his hand at the April Summit of the Americas, but was critical of Obama's statement at the time that he was there "to talk about the future, not the past." Chavez explained that he had decided to give President Obama the book "The Open Veins of Latin America" precisely to inform him of the region's suffering under the "imperial influence" of the United States, asserting that "it is impossible to discuss the future without thinking about or discussing the past." Considering the actions the United States had taken in the region since their April encounter - such as the coup in Honduras and the installation of "seven Yankee bases" in Colombia - Chavez lamented that Obama "must not have read the book." Rangel joked that Obama had probably exchanged the book for one by Carlos Alberto Montaner or Vargas Llosa [both writers associated with the political right].

14. (SBU) During the interview with Rangel, Chavez concluded that "Obama may end up being . . . a great frustration . . . he may end up being only a token used by the empire that continues acting against and attacking the world in a manner even more ferocious and aggressive than in the times of Bush, which is a lot to say." Complaining about the militarization of U.S. policy toward Venezuela, Chavez argued that the United States continued to ignore

CARACAS 00000077 002 OF 003

Latin America, treating it as a "backyard" where they "unleash the guard dogs"

15. (SB) However, Chavez also told Rangel that, during their meeting in Trinidad, Obama had told him that "we will have our differences but I will never get involved ("meterme") in things internal to Venezuela." Chavez said he had responded, "President, believe me that we want to talk but it has not been possible." In response to Rangel's question about a possible "relaxation of tensions" ("distension") with the United States, Chavez agreed that it was possible and said he had told Obama so when they had met. Chavez said he had told Obama: "Look, I am going to repeat the same thing I said eight years ago to your predecessor, 'I want to be your friend. We want to talk.'" (Note: Chavez said this in Spanish and English. End Note.) He noted that days earlier, Vice Foreign Minister Francisco Arias Cardenas had requested his permission to meet with "an emissary from the U.S. government." (Note: Chavez did not refer to Ambassador Duddy by name. End Note.) Chavez said he had told Arias "immediately that he should proceed" with the meeting. "They claim they want to talk, they claim that if there had been an airspace violation it was an error, they claim that they have no plans of aggression against Venezuela. We want to talk, so it is possible that there can be, as you say, a reduction of tension." Chavez denied, however, that he would be sending any additional "signals": "We already gave signals," he said, referring to the agreement for the U.S. Ambassador to return to Venezuela.

16. (SBU) In his public remarks, Chavez downplayed the recent alleged violations of Venezuelan airspace by U.S. military planes. He criticized "Washington's denial of the facts" since "we have proof," but nonetheless pointed out that the U.S. pilot had not shown "aggressive intent" in the recorded conversation with the Maiquetia control tower. "The fact that the pilot responded to the controller was a good sign, since it enabled a dialogue." He concluded by implying the matter was closed: "They have recognized that it was an error. We have recognized it as an error."

"I Am a Marxist" Declaration Headlines AN Address

¶7. (C) During his January 15 address, President Chavez affirmed that "for the first time I admit that I am a Marxist" ("Y por primera vez asumo . . . asumo el marxismo.") He called Marxism the "most advanced theory in the scientific interpretation of history, and most advanced proposal for the kind of world that Christ envisioned more than two thousand years ago: one in which equality, peace, and love reign." Chavez added that he also considered himself "Christian, Bolivarian, and Socialist." (Note: The televised coverage of the speech showed polite applause in the front rows of the audience when Chavez pronounced himself a Marxist. However, Charge Caulfield, who was seated in the back rows among local officials from the ruling PSUV party, noted an eerie silence as these loyal Chavistas uncharacteristically sat on their hands. End Note.)

¶8. (SBU) Later in his speech, in explaining that his Bolivarian socialism would not eliminate small private property and business, Chavez assured his audience that Marx and Engels had defended small private property as "the basis of all individual and collective liberty" and that he would "continue to convert our people into owners . . . as individuals, families, and collectively." He charged that the opposition was trying to alarm the population by claiming otherwise.

Catholic Church Needs to Perform an Exorcism

CARACAS 00000077 003 OF 003

¶9. (SBU) In the context of discussing the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake and the profound pain it brought to "fellow Christians," Chavez welcomed the new Papal Nuncio, Pietro Parolin, and expressed his desire for "good relations" with the Vatican. However, he "very respectfully" suggested that the Nuncio have an "exorcism" performed for the Papal Mission in Caracas, after the previous Nuncio had provided refuge to "sadist, rapist" student leader Nixon Moreno in 2007 (ref c), and because some of Venezuela's bishops "have been subordinate to the interests of the bastard Venezuelan bourgeoisie."

Electricity Rationing Plan a "Dreadful Error"

¶10. (SBU) Chavez echoed in his address a number of the themes he described in detail during his informal review of 2009 accomplishments on December 30 (ref b), principally that in the face of a world economic crisis "brought on by capitalism," the GBRV still managed to make demonstrable progress on its social priorities. He highlighted a reduction in unemployment, inequality, and poverty rates, as well as an increase in the minimum wage and the reach of school feeding programs.

¶11. (SBU) Following the GBRV's January 13 implementation of electricity rationing measures in Caracas - and the subsequent cancellation of those measures 24 hours later - Chavez admitted that the lack of advance notice and inscrutable guidance to residents had constituted a "dreadful error." He added that the rationing plan had been "poorly executed, although not badly drawn up," and criticized the political opposition for its "disinformation campaign, through which they seek to sow panic and alarm in the population." Chavez again cast blame for the crisis on the severe drought affecting the country, which had led to low water levels at the hydroelectric dams: "This is the only cause of our electricity 'diet,'" he stressed.

Comment

¶12. (C) Chavez' announcement that he was a Marxist was hardly surprising given his description of his Bolivarian revolution as "socialism for the 21st century." However, his use of the word "Marxist" seems to have made many loyal Chavistas uneasy. Polls continue to show that the Venezuelan population, by a large majority, reject "communism," support private property, and reject the Cuban model.

¶13. (C) Chavez' expression of a willingness to "relax tensions" and talk with the United States comes in a context in which, within the last month alone, he has personally charged the U.S. with plans to invade Venezuela from its "base" in Curacao, violation of its airspace by a (fictitious) U.S. military aircraft, and militarily occupying Haiti and giving the marines a license to kill Haitians (refs d, e). In such a context, it is not clear that his expression of interest in talking to the United States represents a real commitment to serious dialogue. On a more pragmatic level, some government insiders seem to recognize that some level of communication with the U.S. is necessary. We will continue to follow up on the opportunities when they arise.
CAULFIELD